

Chair Salahudin Bin-Yusif opened the June 21, 2021 meeting of the Middletown Police Advisory Board at 7:04 p.m., with the following members in attendance: Salahudin Bin-Yusif, Emy Diaz, Michael Harpe, Jacqueline Burditt, Jelani Bryant, John Carwell, Wanda Dean, Michael Harpe, Jason Hunt, Joyce Kidd, Susan Mitchell, Yvette Santiago, Police Chief Texter and Police Union Representative Michael Hilliard.

It was moved by Joyce Kidd and seconded by Emy Diaz to approve moving the agenda forward.

It was moved by Emy Diaz, seconded by John Carwell to approve the minutes from the May meeting as written. Moved 12-0.

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**CHAIR'S REPORT:** Bin-Yusif reported that the Board needs to draft a report for the Mayor and Council for its July meeting. He said the group has about three weeks to draft a report. We started out slow but have been making great strides in getting the PAB set up correctly, he said. We set up bylaws, and don't forget they are a living document. If you have any ideas and want to change anything, bring it up, he said.

One of the things the Board discussed when creating the bylaws was the three consecutive meetings missed and members could lose their seat, he said. Speaking of attendance, the Rev. Dan Betters has requested to step down. He said it has been difficult to participate on the board due to his schedule. So, the Board will be looking for another religious officiant to take his place. He was one of the members that was recommended by the NAACP, so we will look for replacement, Bin-Yusif said. If any member of the PAB has a recommendation, put them forward.

There was a question about Jelani Bryant's attendance. He said he has missed some meetings due to his college classes and schedule, but said he would still like to be a part of the board and his fall schedule looks to be more conducive for attending meetings. The board agreed to let Jelani continue on the board as long as he continues to show interest in the meetings.

The Board has been attending the community meetings sponsored by the MPD. The Board raised concerns about raising awareness of security and safety issues that need to be addressed in Middletown, such as the lighting in certain parts of Town. It was a great job done by the MPD and the partners and leaders in our community to make that happen.

He said the Board is working to continue to evaluate the MPD police reports and see if anything can be changed or shown differently. We also want to help see more diversity on the PD to meet the needs and reflect the community it serves. We are seeing more diversity and are very happy about that, he said.

We also would like to see the police department expand to meet the growing community. Although we don't have a high crime area, it will be good to stay on top of keeping the quality of life.

We want to work in the future this year to have a meeting with the M&C, police department and community in some kind of public forum where people can meet the officers and the members of the PAB, he reported.

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## **COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

### **Police Report Evaluation Committee:**

Michael Harpe said there is no report as he has had a death in his family so he has not been able to convene the subcommittee of late.

### **Community Connections Committee:**

John Carwell reported that he would like to thank his committee members for their work during the subcommittee meetings. At the last meeting on June 15, Burditt, Carwell, Kidd and Bin-Yusif met to discuss and MSgt. Scott Saunders helped to add some context to things we hope to do to support the MPD. Our agenda items were: discussing the identity and purpose of PAB; developing a social media presence and working with Saunders regarding community meetings.

Carwell drafted some logos to share with the PAB. He would like some feedback on which logos appeal the most. Once the logo is established, the social media side can be explored. It's important when we join social media, we put thoughts into the content – perhaps for the whole year – and really try to form a bridge between MPD and the community, Carwell said.

There was also some discussion about the shooting in Millbranch community and I would really like to open the floor to Burditt, who lives there, to hear her thoughts on the matter, he said.

MSgt. Saunders also announced the youth academy this summer, where he is still searching for youth candidates to attend.

This subcommittee is also looking into public information events such as rules of engagement, mental health, domestic violence and gun safety forums. It could be helpful as a PAB to discuss what police have to contend with and whether it's fair that they have to do so.

Burditt said her concerns about Millbranch is that people are not reaching out to police, is that correct Chief Texter? Chief Texter replied that it's not only correct that the people are not giving information but in fact, they are lying when being questioned.

She also said she doesn't feel like she is seeing cars around town as much as before, or bicycle police. Texter said he hears the opposite from most members in the community. He said people have been commenting to him lately that they are seeing the police vehicles around Town much more often. He said the MPD was not able to hire any seasonals (bike police) this year due to a lack of interest. He said we have to categorize the seasonals in the same overall mentality that there is a decline in interest to work in police departments, period, right now.

Burditt also asked if there could be more of a presence at the basketball courts in Millbranch, where the alleged incidents have been occurring. Texter replied that the MPD has stepped up its monitoring of that area since the first shooting incident in the neighborhood. "I've directed officers to spend more time there and I know that they have."

Emy Diaz asked the Chief if there are enough officers to handle complaints in addition to social or special events? Chief said there are extra duty assignments to help handle special events. He said the department is actively hiring to try to help with recruitment and staffing. We're still moving forward, he said, and will continue with hiring processes until we can increase staffing to what we need.

### **Research Committee:**

Susan Mitchell said she does not have a report at this time because she got pulled away from her research due to a family member's illness. She said she has been looking into what other PAB's are doing around the state and country, looking for things that are "out of the box" and different, based on communities our size. She hopes to be able to have a more conclusive report next month.

### **Chief Texter Report:**

Chief Texter reported the significant events for June, 2021. He said there was a shots fired complaint on May 28 on Lake Street. He said there were 15 spent shell casings. The police have

identified some people in the area, but have received no cooperation on the investigation from anyone.

Dean asked last month for information about the shots fired on E. Sarazen Drive on May 3.

Texter said although there was a tremendous response from the community regarding this event, and following the incident and they received a lot of help and information from the community, but the first call to 911 Center wasn't until 7:25:48, shooting was 7:15 – call was dispatched at 7:30. There were questions about response times and where officers were.

Texter said: We had 5 cars that night – officer in district car was transporting prisoner to prison; one officer on a crash; two officers on a weapons complaint (one officer was in field training); officer investigating an abuse complaint; one at K-9 training. Sgt. was able to pull away and get to the scene first; the sergeant did quick evaluation of the situation and said everyone was safe. The victim, intended target, was not present.

From the time she called, from the time it was reported, it was almost 15 minutes. We were there 1:46 from dispatch time, he said. He said Ms. Dean was spot on with her complaint that response time was 15 minutes later than the shooting, but there needs to be an understanding of people waiting so long to call into 911 in the first place.

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### **Regarding Millbranch:**

After the May 23 shots fired complaint on Marldale Drive, people have not cooperating at all, in fact, giving false information. Those interviewed told police, “It’s your job to figure it out.” Saying they were not on the scene, but there were in fact there (due to video surveillance proof). The MPD has set up a meeting with Burditt’s help for Wednesday night to have a community meeting. Hopefully, we can get some resolution and community input in an open forum, Texter said.

### **Things the MPD are working on right now:**

- Working to do a version of the Noble program, where we can engage youth and give them tips on things they can expect when they are pulled over or have to talk to police in general and how it’s best handled.
- Will be doing a gun safety and awareness program, starting with the youth academy this summer.
- Officers have been going through the ABLE program and will be teaching that to all of the MPD officers.
- Officers have been taking fair and impartial training and just had two officers go through crisis intervention training to get certified in that.
- The police are trained each year by NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, to help them handle the various situations they could run into in the community.
- If anyone has any feedback or suggestions on how to make things better, he is always willing to listen to the ideas.

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### **Questions for the Chief:**

Joyce Kidd: How many officers on the street at any given time? How many live in Middletown? There are six assigned to a patrol squad. He said he is required to have a minimum of 4 working patrol at any time, as there are training and vacations and sick time factored into the equation.

Wanda Dean: What was the weapons complaint during the Legends complaint? Why were there 2 officers for one complaint? Answer: The car was a two-person car; an officer was in-field training, so that's why there were two people on one complaint.

Who is left at the police station? Chief: We have a civilian at the department. And that's typical of departments of our size and most departments in Delaware.

Bin-Yusif said this is what we are trying to drill down upon as an advisory board, to come up with the magic number is of how many officers needed overall.

Chief: This is not typical of an average night – as you discussed, we are working really hard to try to get people hired – would like the PAB to help us because the likelihood of getting more people in to apply, the likelihood of hiring more people. Hope we are successful in our next two hiring events. I want you to know I'm with you 100 percent on the hiring.

Dean said the Town should consider doing a video to entice people to come to Middletown. This problem with recruitment has been going on for many, many years. Chief said we are “not doing the same old thing.” We are attacking social media, assigning groups to go out and recruit at different places.

Bin-Yusif asked Mike Hilliard about his feeling about retention of officers in the MPD.

Hilliard said he has been here for 7 years, seen many officers leave for many reasons. The State Police is our (and most police departments') biggest competitor because they start at \$71,500 and offer take-home cars, he said. As an FOP, we have tried to work on different things to improve the morale and different incentives like take-home cars or even allowing facial hair.

Santiago asked if the FOP looked at incentives like rent reductions at apartment complexes and sometimes complexes are willing to negotiate better rates.

Hilliard said the town doesn't own the complexes, so we wouldn't be able to negotiate the rates, but he does understand that several of the complexes are doing reductions on their own because they like the idea of having law enforcement living in the area.

Billy Warrick asked what's the problem with starting salary? What's Middletown's? Roughly \$54,000 right out of the academy. Hilliard said after year-three, there's quite a significant increase. This is the last year of the collective bargaining agreement and they will start negotiating for next contract.

Have you considered hiring part-time officers? Chief said he's not even sure he can do that under the collective bargaining agreement.

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### **PAL Center:**

Bin-Yusif told the members to go out and meet with their communities to talk about the potential of a PAL Center because we need to work on getting something for the youth to do.

Also, look at emails regarding intern for the PAB – a year-long internship opportunity.

Where do we want to be as an Advisory Board? July, August, September – Do we want to meet in person starting in July or wait until fall?

Carwell said he would like to meet in person. Bryant said he would like to meet in person again. The board decided to meet in person for the July meeting, with a hybrid option for those who would like to teleconference into the meeting.

Dean asked if this year's CALEA report is completed? Chief said they were in Middletown recently and the report usually takes a few months to complete.

The next meeting of the PAB will be held on Monday, July 19, 2021.